

U.S. ARMY SECTION  
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM  
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(S&A)

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Lessons Learned Number 35: Clear and Hold Operations (U)

TO: See Distribution

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1. (U) Attached as Inclosure 1 are the latest "Lessons Learned" from counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam.

2. (U) The information contained in "Lessons Learned" is primarily intended for use by US Advisors in Vietnam. Lessons may be of value for direct application, or they may simply reinforce existing tactics, techniques, or doctrine.

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U.S. ARMY SECTION

MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM

APO 143, San Francisco, California

MACAR-OT (S&A)

10 January 1964

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 35: Clear and Hold Operations (U)

TO: See Distribution

1. (CMHA) INTRODUCTION.

a. This "Lessons Learned" is concerned with the conduct of "clear and hold" operations in counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

b. By definition, a clear and hold operation is a military operation conducted in direct support of province rehabilitation with the mission of clearing and denying an area to the enemy. The enemy is either destroyed in place or forced to withdraw; subsequently security of the area is maintained and defended against enemy harassment until local defense forces can assume the responsibility.

2. (CMHA) BACKGROUND.

a. In general, counterinsurgency operations in the RVN can be categorized as being one of three types: "search and clear", "fix and destroy", or "clear and hold" operations. (See Inclosure 1 for an explanation of these terms).

b. From both the military and the political points of view, "clear and hold" operations are considered to be the most effective of the three types, for such operations, when successful, result in the permanent seizure of terrain from Viet Cong (VC) domination and the placing of additional populace under governmental protection and control. However, shortages of trained units or personnel or other military considerations sometimes preclude clear and hold operations. Although these situations are less prevalent today than previously, occasions do arise when instead of clear and hold operations, short duration search and clear or fix and destroy operations are necessary. These latter operations

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 35: Clear and Hold Operations (U)

serve the useful purpose of keeping the VC off-balance and preventing him from establishing permanent bases in operational areas. However, these operations hold no real promise of ending the VC insurgency effort; they serve only as a stopgap until Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) forces are able to employ clear and hold tactics.

c. The shortcomings of search and clear operations are evident. The operations seldom are successful since the VC frequently can maneuver to avoid the "sweep" forces without a fight, only to return to the area upon the departure of the friendly forces. The confidence and support of the civilian population cannot be won by adoption of such tactics. The people will not cooperate with friendly forces when they know that several days later they will be abandoned to the mercy of the VC. The discoveries of the British Forces fighting insurgency in Malaya regarding sweep (search and clear) operations have been reaffirmed in the RVN: generally speaking, sweep operations are a waste of time, effort and manpower from which few positive returns are gained and such operations should be discontinued at the earliest practicable time in keeping with the situation in favor of a systematic "clear and hold" operations program.

d. The following is a general discussion of the concept of clear and hold operations. (Fix and destroy operations per se are not discussed in this lessons learned; however, it will be noted that in actuality, fix and destroy operations are a part of the overall clear and hold concept of operations).

### 3. (CMHA) CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS.

#### a. General.

(1) Clear and hold operations are designed to destroy all enemy forces and organizations in an area of operations through offensive tactics. They are usually conducted in direct support of the strategic hamlet program and therefore entail the resettlement into strategic hamlets of families living in VC or uncontrolled areas. Because of the scope of operations, clear and hold programs should not be undertaken by forces of less than battalion strength, should fit into an overall plan for systematically gaining governmental control of the land and the people from the VC, and should be limited to areas of manageable dimensions.

(2) The conduct of a clear and hold operation normally is broken down into two general phases. Phase I includes a search and clear mission with concurrent offensive actions. Surprise, speed, deception and rapid concentration of overwhelming forces are the essential elements of success. Minimum emphasis is placed on terrain objectives. Maximum paywar efforts are made to win the support of the people. Ninety percent of the search and clear phase of operations is devoted to the constant patrolling of the area by small sized unit patrols. Phase II is the

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holding phase which encompasses denying the area of operation to the enemy and the establishment of a strategic hamlet(s). Once the strategic hamlet program is firmly established, the hamlet militia is trained and the enemy is cleared from the area, the local defense forces assume responsibility for the defense of the villages and hamlets and the regular units are freed to conduct new clear and hold operations in outlying areas.

b. Concept of Operations - Phase I - Offensive Actions.

(1) Organization of Operational Areas.

(a) In clear and hold operations the battalion (for discussion purposes a battalion size operation is used in this instance) normally is assigned a specific area of responsibility. The battalion commander secures a base of operations and then assigns specific areas of responsibility to subordinate companies, retaining one unit (company or platoon) as a battalion reaction force. Each company subsequently seizes and secures an advance company base and establishes two platoon patrol bases.

(b) The size of the area assigned to a regular unit depends upon the mission, terrain, the nature of the local VC units and the troops available. Generally, because of the rugged terrain and/or densely jungle covered areas that are under control of the enemy, assigned areas of responsibility are relatively small. This helps insure the establishment of effective control measures while preventing the enemy from circumventing friendly forces and regrouping elsewhere.

(2) Combat Bases.

(a) Within assigned areas or subareas, commanders establish mobile combat bases from which units conduct operations as part of the clear and hold effort. Static security posts, as needed, are established to secure troops, installations and lines of communication. The combat base, as the center of tactical operations, includes essential command, control and administrative elements of the clear and hold unit.

(b) Each unit of the force normally maintains a reaction force of appropriate strength at its base to be used as a strike force in response to contacts with the enemy. Whenever feasible, the reaction force should be airmobile.

(3) Offensive Action.

(a) At the start of clear and hold operations, the

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exact strength and location of the enemy seldom is known. If known, fix and destroy operations are initiated immediately. Normally, however an extended program of harassment through initial search and clear tactics is necessary to locate and destroy the enemy. This harassment is accomplished by maintaining surveillance and by conducting combat patrols, eagle flights (small heliborne operations) ambushes, counter-ambushes, and raids, both day and night.

(b) When a large enemy force is definitely located, priority of all available combat power is employed in a fix and destroy operation to eliminate the enemy. Encirclement usually offers the most effective means to fix the enemy in place and destroy him. A battalion or company may conduct this phase of the clear and hold operation or the division reaction force may be used. Eagle flights are an effective part of this phase.

(c) Pursuit, the final phase, is ordered when the enemy is unable to maintain his position and endeavors to escape. Reaction forces of all units must be prepared to move out immediately to conduct fix and destroy and pursuit operations.

(d) After completion of the tactical phase of operations, the battalion proceeds to defend and hold the area until the strategic hamlet program is finished and paramilitary forces assume the responsibility for security of the area.

#### c. Concept of Operations - Phase II - Holding Phase.

(1) Phase II is the holding phase which encompasses denying the area of operation to the enemy and establishing strategic hamlets. A natural sequence of events as part of the holding phase might include the following:

- (a) Providing military security of the sealed off area.
- (b) Simultaneous with provision of security, continuing paywar efforts.
- (c) Initiating directed civil actions effort.
  - 1. Road building program.
  - 2. Assemble resources.
  - 3. Engineer effort. (Assisted by regular forces).

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 35: Clear and Hold Operations (U)

a. Build roads and bridges. (Part of an overall plan).

b. Clear vegetation from hamlet area.

c. Stake out the specific location for houses.

(d) Obtaining a water source.

(e) Establishing a dispensary immediately by division medical teams. Latrines are built as soon as possible.

(f) Bringing in houses.

(g) Constructing houses.

(h) Planting gardens.

(i) Maintaining security of hamlet.

(j) Building a school and church.

(2) The importance of a well planned and organized psywar and civic action program conducted in conjunction with any clear and hold operation is emphasized. These programs are of particular importance during the "holding phase" of operations. Plans are based on an integrated and coordinated civil-military approach designed progressively to reestablish government control and to gain the trust, confidence and active cooperation of the people. Close liaison between the Province Chief and the military commander is essential in order to obtain additional funds, supplies, or equipment which requires approval by the Province Chief or by higher headquarters.

(3) Civic action is often the major contributing factor in the development of favorable public opinion and in the defeat of the enemy. Commanders at all levels, are encouraged to participate in local civic projects when such participation does not detract from the primary mission. Civic programs often may be designed to provide employment to bolster the local economy and reduce the number of unemployed. This tends to lower the number of discontented who are vulnerable to enemy propaganda. The population is informed that civil assistance is not a gift, but that actions taken are to assist the civilians to help themselves as well as the friendly government.

(4) Commanders must train the individual soldiers on military civic action matters prior to a clear and hold mission to insure that they understand and cooperate with such programs. Individual military civic action participation ranges from practicing basic military

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 35: Clear and Hold Operations (U)

courtesy and discipline to execution of formal projects.

(5) For a detailed discussion of these type missions, tactics and operations, see FM 31-16, "Counter guerrilla Operations". In addition inclosure 2 contains an example of a 5th Infantry Division, ARVN, clear and hold operation plan in support of the strategic hamlet program.

4. (CMHA) LESSONS LEARNED.

a. The VC have indicated they are prepared to fight for their popular home bases. Clear and hold operations conducted in conjunction with strategic hamlet programs have proved to be the most effective counter-measure to VC control of the land and the people.

b. Large scale operations (bn or higher) should use clear and hold or fix and destroy tactics since experience has shown that search and clear operations produce insignificant results.

c. Regular units must clear and hold an area until a strategic hamlet is organized and completed and paramilitary forces are capable of controlling the area.

d. Major unit clear and hold operations should be directed toward destruction of enemy forces through offensive tactics.

e. If a clear and hold force is withdrawn prematurely the VC will react, and the paramilitary forces will be dangerously over-extended in trying to fill the gap left by the regular force.

f. Clear and hold operations normally should begin with a search and clear mission in the assigned area which is under control of the enemy force.

g. The initial force employed must be large enough to accomplish all phases of the operation.

h. Prior planning should include obtaining adequate intelligence of the inhabitant's attitude concerning moving into a hamlet.

i. Eagle flights and intelligence platoons should be employed on reconnaissance missions to assist the clear and hold forces in locating the enemy.

j. Maneuver elements should be oriented on the enemy and not on terrain objectives.

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k. Speed is essential in acting on intelligence concerning mobile enemy forces.

l. Ambushes, employment of stay behind forces, and use of patrols are effective tactics in search and clear operations.

m. Effective use of psywar and civic action by ARVN forces is essential in a clear and hold operation.

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DEFINITIONS OF MISSIONS

1. Clear and Hold. Operations in direct support of strategic hamlet or population resettlement program. Mission of clearing enemy from an area and denying the area to the enemy.
2. Fix and Destroy. An operation based on specific intelligence with mission of contacting and destroying enemy troop elements, headquarters or other installations.
3. Search and Clear. An operation conducted in an area where suspected enemy may be located with the mission of locating enemy elements and installations thereafter destroying him in place or driving him out of the area.

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5th Infantry Division ARVN  
Clear and Hold  
Operation Plan Format

GENERAL PLAN. (Example follows)

1. This plan is aimed at:

a. Destroying all regular and local enemy forces, as well as all enemy Provincial and District Commissariat and key agencies, which have been stationed in secret zones in the area or which have operated throughout the area.

b. Destroying all enemy food caches and rice storage installations in the area.

c. Destroying all enemy property, command posts and communication systems in the area.

d. Establishing contact between provinces by installing a joint provincial strategic hamlet system; re-establishing the main traffic communication system and establishing additional areas of communication in order to facilitate friendly operational movements and hamper the movement, liaison and supply of the enemy.

2. These objectives will be accomplished through an extended and continuous operation. All military and civilian facilities in the division tactical area and province areas will be utilized to insure that all phases are properly coordinated.

3. This operation plan remains within the framework of the pacification plans of the provinces. This is a division controlled operation.

4. This plan is disseminated to all levels of command for preparation of their plans and orders and for requesting administrative and logistical support.

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OPPLAN

Reference: Map,

I. SITUATION

a. Enemy forces.

(1) Outline the enemy secret zones within the operational area.

(2) List all known local enemy forces and their locations, size and designation.

b. Friendly forces.

(1) List task organization, to include all forces stationed in the operational area, i.e. Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps outposts, and guard towers.

(2) Morale of the people in the operational area.

(a) Total number of people to include the estimated number of families.

(b) Since the area is unsafe and influenced by the VC, the population can be broken down as follows:

1. Percentage of relatives who have abandoned their families to join the VC.

2. Percentage of the population who intend to return to the government controlled area. These people are still under VC pressures and are waiting for regular forces to free them from the VC and for resettlement.

c. Assumptions:

II. MISSION. (Example of a mission)

Phase I. Division conducts a long term clear and hold operation within the two province areas to annihilate the enemy, destroy all VC installations and provide military support to insure maximum security for the completion of the strategic hamlet construction plan.

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Phase II. Re-establish the communication areas.

Phase III. Construct 30 fortified hamlets in the assigned areas.

### III. EXECUTION.

1. Concept of operations. This plan follows a prescribed time schedule for each province or area. (Example follows)

a. First Province. Construct 15 fortified hamlets which are broken down into areas (see overlay) and into the following phases:

(1) 1st Phase (10 days): The cadres make contact with the people, prepare a census, explain the program to the people and prepare sites for fortified hamlets. Concurrently, the regular forces encircle the objectives to group the people.

(2) 2d Phase (30 days): The cadres persuade the people to move to the new locations and construct houses under the support of the regular units.

(3) 3d Phase (30 days): Construct the fortified hamlets and defense fortifications; organize the people into groups.

b. Second Province (Outline phases as above).

c. The tactical operation order, prepared in detail and based on each period, would be published later. An example of a mission and concept of operation of one portion of an overall plan follows:

\*

\*

\*

2. Mission. Destroy the secret enemy area and move the people living in the secret area for resettlement in strategic hamlets.

3. Execution.

a. Concept of operation.

(1) Phase 1. Execute an envelopment to seal off the entire operational area.

(2) Phase 2. Conduct long range search and clear operations in the designated areas to fix and destroy the VC secret hide-outs and installations.

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b. Phases for Construction Fortified Hamlets (Annex to the Plan). (For format see Inclosure 2 to Incl 2)

IV. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS. (Annex to the Plan)

V. COMMAND AND SIGNAL:

a. Signal

b. Command

ACKNOWLEDGE:

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ANNEXES: A-Paywar/Civil Affairs  
B-Phase for construction  
of fortified hamlets.  
C-Administrative Plan (Omitted)  
D-Overlay (Omitted)

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Annex A (Psywar/Civil Affairs) to OPLAN.

Reference: MAP,

I. SITUATION.

- a. Enemy forces )  
See OPLAN
- b. Friendly forces )

II. MISSION. (Same as OPLAN)

III. EXECUTION.

a. Concept of operation:

(1) The operational phases will be prescribed later based on the general concept of operations and the number of locations in which the people will be grouped.

(2) Psywar activities are executed concurrently and are in consonance with the operational phases.

b. General plan for each phase.

(1) Phase I: Encirclement operation (D day)

(a) Purpose of the operation: Conduct a propaganda campaign to encourage the people in the operational area to answer the appeal to move their property and foods to the prescribed locations. Convince the people to move and resettle in the new hamlets.

(b) Methods of execution:

1. Use the direct method of execution (go to each house; make broadcasts using ground troops and aircraft.) Make appeals and explain to the people why they should move to the new locations.

2. Distribute leaflets by hand and/or by aircraft; prepare slogans; display posters; distribute magazines and news pictures; and show movies to assist in orienting the people.

3. Assist the people in the transportation of their belongings and personal movement to the new locations.

(c) Propaganda subjects:

Inclosure 1 to Incl 2

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1. The area of operation is an unsafe area. The Government and regular units are not responsible for any casualties and damage to their property.

2. The VC hide in and control the area to create unrest, deceive and rob the people. They force the young men to join their units. They force other people to give information and to supply them with rice and money.

3. Property, rice and personal belongings must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Communist bandits. The Government desires that people move to the new location within the prescribed time (D day). Any property, rice and personal belongings left behind will be destroyed by the ARVN forces.

4. Each family will be assisted by the Government and the regular units in their relocation which will permit them to live in safety and happiness.

5. People who return and live in the new hamlets will be considered by the Government and regular units as friends. Those who do not will be considered as enemy.

6. The areas the people have departed from will be bombed and burned by aircraft.

(2) Phase II: Provide facilities for those people who have moved their property to the new locations by allocating land to them for construction of houses and cultivation of gardens. (D day)

(a) Purpose: Explain the National Strategic Hamlet policy to the people who have recently resettled in the new location. Provide mutual support to the indoctrination program with the SDC activities (census, classification, health and social service).

(b) Methods of execution.

1. Organize meetings for propaganda and indoctrination purposes.

2. Continue to distribute to each person, magazines, special bulletins and news pictures. Prepare slogans and put up posters.

3. Make daily broadcasts at prescribed times.

4. Show movies and organize entertainment.

(c) Propaganda subjects for briefing.

1. National Strategic Hamlet Policy.

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2. Importance of the organization of the hamlet.
3. Family groups.
4. Cooperatives.
5. Exchange of labor.
6. Allocation of rice fields, land and farming implements.
7. Maintenance of security.

(3) Phase III:

(D day) (a) Organization of the people in the hamlet into groups:

1. Family groups.
2. Combat Youth.
3. Aged and teen age groups.

(b) Purpose: Continue to indoctrinate and guide the people to support the organization of the groups.

(c) Methods of execution.

1. Increase the activities listed in the paragraph "methods of execution" of Phase II.

2. Conduct an indoctrination program to instill a competitive spirit by displaying the pictures of hamlets which have been constructed in the adjacent localities.

(d) Propaganda subjects:

1. Provide additional indoctrination subjects.
2. National Strategic Hamlet Policy.
3. Communist plots in South Vietnam.
4. Denunciation of the Communist bandits' crimes.
5. Objectives and policies of the Government.
6. Accomplishments of the people's groups in Strategic Hamlets throughout the nation.



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7. Continue to study all problems and answer all the people's questions.

(4) Phase IV: Consolidation of the Strategic Hamlet and establishment of defense fortifications (D day).

(a) Purposes:

1. Continue indoctrination program to gain the confidence of the people in the hamlets.
2. Give assistance in the organization of people's groups, in census taking and screening of the people in the new hamlets.
3. Promote anti-communist feelings.

(b) Methods of execution.

1. Continue indoctrination on the National Strategic Hamlet Policy.
2. Reinforce the propaganda facilities: printed matter, films, and entertainment.
3. Organize competition between groups of the hamlets.

(c) Propaganda subjects.

1. Continue previous indoctrination subjects and develop new themes.
2. Continue to answer questions of the people.

(5) Enemy propaganda. This task is conducted continuously and concurrently with the civil affairs phase.

(a) Purposes:

1. Cause separation of the civilians and the enemy, and among the enemy.
2. Persuade the people in the new hamlets to call upon their children, brothers, sisters and other relatives to return home.

(b) Methods of execution.

1. Use aircraft to drop leaflets into the VC secret zones.

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2. Use megaphones to appeal to the enemy to return.

(c) Propaganda subjects.

1. The hardships and dangers that exist within the secret zones each time the regular units attack.

2. The likelihood of VC cadres starving after construction of the hamlets and accompanying security of the people.

3. The clemency order of the Government toward the cadres who are still in the Communist bandit ranks.

4. The peaceful, joyful, happy and free life of the relatives of the misled persons who have joined the VC.

#### IV. FACILITIES.

a. Personnel: Four operating Psywar teams of the Psywar Company attached to Province hamlet construction cadre teams.

b. Propaganda equipment: Organizational equipment of the Psywar Company, supplemented by equipment from the Division G-5, as required.

c. Printing: The Office of the Director of Psywar will provide printed matter, leaflets, posters, pictures and magazines.

d. Office of the Director of Psywar will provide aircraft, upon request, for loudspeaker broadcasts and leaflet drops.

e. Vehicles: Organic to the Psywar Company and the Provincial Information Service.

V. GENERAL OPERATING PROCEDURES: Organize hamlet construction cadre teams to cooperate with the Psywar Company operating with the operational units.

#### VI. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS.

a. Food: 10 days of rations for each phase of activities.

b. POL: provided by the operational CP.

c. Weapons and ammunition: small arms and one basic load of ammunition.

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VII. MISCELLANEOUS:

- a. Paywar team leaders report directly to the supported unit commander.
- b. Comply with the orders of the supported unit commander.
- c. Plan the interception of enemy propaganda.

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PHASES FOR CONSTRUCTION OF FORTIFIED HAMLETS  
IN \_\_\_\_\_ PROVINCE

| Phase<br>&<br>Time | Area  | Name of<br>Hamlet | Coordinates | Houses | Population | Military<br>Supporting<br>Forces | Remarks |
|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-------------|--------|------------|----------------------------------|---------|
|                    |       |                   |             |        |            |                                  |         |
|                    | Total |                   |             |        |            |                                  |         |
|                    |       |                   |             |        |            |                                  |         |
|                    | Total |                   |             |        |            |                                  |         |

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